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## THE SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITY

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Tradition's hold on schools, tenacious through hundreds of years, is slipping. Here and there a rift appears. Schools are venturing, a bit timidly, to break with books and the concomitant bookishness. Some of the ventures are experimental, some radical; they are bound to be. But there is significance for those who have dared to make the break in the fact that quotation marks less often appear in connection with the words "new" and "modern" when referring to new education and modern school.

When I was superintendent of schools in a Boston suburb and since I have been principal of a private school in Staten Island, I have undertaken considerable adjustment of the curriculum, basing the adjustment on a theory of education which is generally accepted but not so generally practiced. It is short. This is it:

School undertakes to prepare boys and girls for *life*, using the word in its big sense—life as opposed to existence. Therefore, the school tries to relate its teaching to life. It aims at the inculcation not of words but of ideas. It believes in studying not merely the textbook but, in so far as is possible, the *real* thing about which the textbook is written. The school is not an isolated place set apart to recite lessons in; in all its teaching it aims to come into touch with the world in which it is the school's place to prepare pupils to live. Self-activity and self-expression are key-notes of education. School work should be interesting. The pupils should see that school work is worth while. The school believes in methods that open eyes and wake up minds. The end of education is accomplished not merely by making pupils work but by making them *want* to work. The school aims to develop *initiative*, upon which more than anything else depend success, usefulness, and happiness in the world outside school. In a word, school aims to acquaint the

pupil with the world he lives in, so he *can* live in it; to awake him, so he *will* live in it.

That is sound pedagogy, I am sure. That it is sound common sense, I sincerely believe. Yet the break with traditional school isn't easy. It is hard to get away from books. And there are the college-entrance examinations to be prepared for!

My school has no particular course or subject labeled "The Community" but, naturally, believing as we do about the aim of education, we pay a good deal of attention to the city we live in, and we are glad there are few textbooks on the subject. Here are samples of how the pupils make the necessary acquaintances.

The fifth-grade pupils, in connection with geography, make a study of certain typical industries of the United States. Here, for example, is the way they study coal. First, they plan a visit to an obliging local coal dealer, and later discuss in class the things they want to find out from him—the kinds of coal: buckwheat, nut, egg, stove, etc., and their prices; how the coal is delivered to the home, how it is delivered to the dealer; where it comes from; how much it costs at the mine; how much it costs him, if he is willing to tell. The pupils go through the yards. They are shown and told the things they came to find out about. The steam shovel for unloading the coal interests them and the screening apparatus and the big scales—here's an opportunity for a practical sort of arithmetic, an arithmetic based on realities, which puts a great deal of vitality into the subsequent class work in the schoolroom. Then they get folders of the Lehigh and the Lackawanna, and trace the routes to Staten Island from the coal fields. They collect pictures of coal mining and study the process from their geographical readers and from reference books. Then they arrange a coal exhibit on the wall. There are pictures of mining, illustrated accounts written by the pupils, railroad maps, a few photographs taken by the pupils, the specimens of coal in boxes made in the manual training class, a chart giving prices. Other pupils and the parents are invited to the exhibit.

Staten Island has newly built immense terminal docks. Lying at the docks we see foreign ships with strange flags. Huge drays laden with merchandise plod through the streets. Outlandish

beings appear, turbanned, slippers, linen trousered, Hindus, Lascars, Chinese, Japanese. What does it betoken? We plan a trip to the docks leased by the Nippon Yusen Kaisha. The owner grants permission. The sixth grades studying Japan pay the visit. They, too, plan with the teacher what they want to see and find out—the owner of the line, the ships, the crew, the routes taken from Japan, what they bring, where it comes from, where it goes to, how it gets there, the freight rates, what they take back. They go to the docks, and before their eyes geography becomes alive. The products of the East—tea, spices, silks, people of the Orient, commerce, ships, Japan, China, the East Indies—a few blocks from the schoolhouse door!

The seventh-grade pupils in connection with their study of history take a trip to the historic landmarks of lower Manhattan. The class prepares for the trip by studying pictures of the places they are to see and by using reference books dealing with the subject. They use a map of lower New York, number the pictures to correspond with site numbers on the map, trace the routes, and after getting all the information they can and talking it over in class they take the trip. Here are some of the things they see and know about: Battery Park, the site of Fort Amsterdam and Peter Stuyvesant's House, Bowling Green, Pearl Street, Fraunces' Tavern, Broad Street, "Petticoat Lane," Marinus Willet Tablet, site of Federal House, Wall Street, Trinity Church, St. Paul's Chapel, Site of the Liberty Pole, Golden Hill, the City Hall, Nathan Hale Statue. The bare recital of the list conveys little to the reader, but the point is our boys and girls know these places and what they stand for, and as they sit on the bench in Bowling Green, stand about the table in the room where Washington bade farewell to his officers, walk up ancient Broad Street, sit in Washington's pew in old St. Pauls, read the inscription on the tablet commemorating the fight between Liberty boys and British soldiers, sit amid the furnishings of the first capital of the country in City Hall, they get a visualization, a patriotic thrill, a love of old New York, that hardly comes from textbook study. After the trip the City History Club loans us lantern slides and the class gives an illustrated talk to the school and sometimes the parents on "Historic Places in Lower Manhattan." Last year one of the pupils wrote the story of the trip with an account of

the historic incidents involved and it was printed in the local paper.

In the eighth grade the pupils study government—federal, state, and particularly city government. Here some of our most interesting trips are taken. Perhaps the most popular one is to the engine house. They go all over it. They see the sleeping quarters of the men with the provision for instantaneous dressing, the boys slide down the pole to the engine room, they see the alarm-recording apparatus. The obliging driver calls the horses to their places by the pole and snaps on the harness and the driver from his seat pulls the cord that opens the doors. Then they go to headquarters in the Borough Hall and have explained to them the fire-alarm system, concluding with a visit to a fire box and an explanation of how the alarm is rung in.

Another trip made by this class is to the Borough Hall where they visit the street-cleaning department, the sewer department, the tax department, and the borough president's office. They meet the borough president by appointment and he gives them a short talk about his part in the city government. He usually arranges for them a visit to the New York City Hall through which they are guided, concluding with a visit to a meeting of the Board of Estimate and occasionally the opportunity to meet the mayor and other members of the board. The same class has visited meetings of the local board when discussions of interest were due. Usually arrangements are made for a talk on the duties of a policeman by a member of the force. The pupils do not regard their trips as entertainments. They are first prepared for by talks and study.

In the eighth-grade arithmetic class the pupils study banking and business transactions by organizing and conducting a bank, buying and selling stocks and bonds, making investments in real estate. They read the financial pages in the newspapers and bring in and discuss clippings about foreign exchange, and stock and bond quotations. They became so interested that they suggested that the superintendent of the local bank be invited to explain problems that arose in the course of their play banking. He accepted the invitation and gave them an interesting and practical talk on the workings of a modern bank. The class has visited

also the Stock Exchange and the Curb Market and had a glimpse of what Wall Street means. Particularly interesting and worth while was the talk given on thrift by the secretary of a local co-operative bank in which he illustrated vividly how invested money grows, and explained the efficacy for saving of the co-operative bank. As a result of his talk many of the pupils took shares.

Each year the members of our graduating class undertake during the spring a piece of research work in connection with English which is written up, typed, illustrated, if possible, and bound and added to the school library. Last spring the general subject was Staten Island. Several pupils selected topics relating to its history; one pupil wrote on its historic houses, another on Staten Island of fifty years ago, another on Sailors' Snug Harbor, another on the Base Hospital, another on its industries, and so on. All of these were studied by personal investigation, by visiting and revisiting. The pupils themselves took the photographs used in illustrating. Some of the best papers were chosen to be given at the graduation exercises, all of them illustrated by stereopticon slides. On the program they were called "talks." "Essays" and "orations" sound too formidable. Three of these talks I want to speak of particularly. One was called "Housing at Home and Elsewhere." The young author told her story by a series of pictures with comments. There has been no concerted action for attractive homes on Staten Island. It has developed, as many a town, in a hit-or-miss fashion. She showed, for example, the wretched tenements erected by the brick works for its operatives. She showed the cheap rows of ugly houses all alike, built by speculative landlords. She showed the huge billboards of the Land Boom Company which sold lots at \$10.00 down and \$10.00 a month and in the next picture a couple of shacks that represented the only building on a plot after a selling boom was over. Then she showed a series of slides, some of them loaned by a New York architect, and some made from pictures in architectural magazines, illustrating the garden suburb, pictures of Hampstead Garden Suburb, of Weld Hall and Gretna in England, pictures from Bridgeport, Beloit, Williamsport, pictures showing the development of a single block in Elizabeth. She concluded with an appeal to the real

estate men of Staten Island to take advantage of its wonderfully attractive building sites.

The second talk was called "Just among Ourselves." This speaker had taken many pictures. There was one of the chalked scrawlings on the new Court House. There were several offensive billboards; one of these hid one of Staten Island's loveliest views. The author had stepped behind the billboard and photographed the vista shut from view by the crude blatancy of "Budweiser Everywhere." She showed pictures of ramshackle deserted houses, rubbish heaps, littered back yards. I heard the audience gasp. Then she showed a series of "before and after" pictures showing how by concerted movements, by city-beautiful campaigns, other towns had obliterated unsightly spots.

The last speaker called her talk "Cleaning Up." Near the school was a vacant lot that served as a dumping ground for odds and ends of rubbish. It occurred to the school that pupils' interest might be enlisted in ways and means of getting that and similar rubbish heaps cleaned up. So we had offered a prize for the composition giving the best suggestions for ways of going about the cleaning up. The pupils responded with interest and the compositions with their various suggestions had been turned over to the aforesaid last speaker. Her task was to use the various suggestions, or any other plans and methods that she could think of, and go ahead and see how they worked out in practice. "Get the place cleaned up and tell how you did it" were her instructions. She began with a picture of the rubbish-laden lot and told how she had gone to the Civic League, the Street Cleaning Department, the Board of Health, the Park Department, back to the Civic League, to the Tax Department to find the owner, to the owner himself—and each thought the cleaning up was some one's else job. Then she called on the school troop of Boy Scouts. They did it. The last picture showed them with hoes and rakes and shovels.

I have left to the last one important bit of theory upon which our practice is based. It is this. Pupils are not to be receptacles. If what they learn in school is apparent to them as *worth while* they will pass it on; they will *want* to pass it on. They will talk about it at home. They will like to arrange exhibits and talks and

illustrated lectures for other classes, the school, and their parents; and I believe psychology sanctions the statement that by thus doing, they themselves will get a better grasp on the thing they have studied, exhibited, photographed, and talked about. By breaking down the barrier that once existed between school and the world outside, it is even conceivable that the school may render real service to the community.

I remember seeing in the front of certain books the publisher's imprint in Greek which I venture to translate, "If you have Light, pass it on." I think that is a very fine motto for a school.